

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 INR-05 CIAE-00

PM-03 DODE-00 ACDA-10 L-01 EUR-08 IO-03 SP-02 SAM-01

SAB-01 INRE-00 SSO-00 /061 W  
----- 076017

O R 271547Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3558

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1959

LIMDIS

BEIRUT POUCH BAGHDAD

DEPT PASS SECRETARY'S PARTY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE, PLO

SUBJ: SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANESE CRISIS

1. SUMMARY: VIEWED FROM DAMASCUS, FONMIN KHADDAM'S  
MAY 23-26 MEDIATION IN LEBANESE CRISIS REFLECTED  
PRESIDENT ASAD'S INTENT TO RESTORE PUBLIC ORDER TO  
BEIRUT IN WAY WHICH WOULD BOTH ASSURE CONTINUED  
PALESTINIAN FREEDOM OF ACTION IN SOUTH AND AVOID  
SITUATION DEVELOPING WHICH COULD FORCE SYRIA TO  
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INTERVENE MILITARILY IN LEBANON. END SUMMARY.

2. LITTLE HARD INFO HAS YET EMERGED HERE RE KHADDAM'S MEDIATION MISSION OR ITS CAUSES. IT WAS LAUNCHED, HOWEVER, AGAINST BACKGROUND OF HIGH LEVEL SYRIAN CONCERN ABOUT DETERIORATION IN LEBANESE SCENE WHICH SYRIANS HAVE NOTED TO US AFFECTS SYRIA SECOND ONLY TO LEBANON ITSELF. THEY HAVE ALSO REITERATED SYRIA'S DETERMINATION TO SUPPORT PALESTINIANS AND PLO. MEDIA COVERAGE AND EDITORIAL COMMENT (SEPTEL) HAVE STRONGLY ASSERTED POSITIVE NATURE SYRIAN ROLE IN HELPING RESOLVE DANGEROUS PLO-PHALANGIST CONFRONTATION. DECISION TO SEND FONMIN KHADDAM AND DEPMIN DEFENSE AIR FORCE COMMANDER NAJI JAMIL TO LEBANON MAY 24, DAY AFTER FORMATION OF MILITARY GOVERNMENT, ATTESTED TO SERIOUSNESS WITH WHICH SYRIA VIEWED THIS DEVELOPMENT. WHILE ARAFAT'S URGENT APPEAL TO DAMASCUS FOR HELP MAY HAVE HAD SOME INFLUENCE, SYRIA'S PERCEPTION ITS OWN INTEREST WERE PROBABLY PREDOMINANT REASON FOR KHADDAM'S EXTENSIVE MEDIATIONS.

3. PRINCIPAL SYRIAN MOTIVATION, IN OUR VIEW, WAS TO FORESTALL SITUATION DEVELOPING IN WHICH LEBANESE ARMY WOULD UNITE WITH PHALANGIST MILITIA TO MOVE AGAINST PALESTINIANS. THIS WOULD HAVE FACED SYRIA WITH UNPLEASANT CHOICES, INCLUDING POSSIBILITY OF DIRECT SYRIAN MILITARY INTERVENTION. BEYOND PROVIDING SUPPLY LINE AND TRAINING TO LEBANON-BASED PALESTINIANS, WHICH HAS EXISTED FOR SOME TIME, ASAD SURELY WISHED AVOID BECOMING INVOLVED MILITARILY IN LEBANON. SUCH INVOLVEMENT WOULD ONLY DIVERT STRENGTH AND ATTENTION FROM SYRIA'S PRIMARY PROBLEM AT PRESENT, ITS DISPUTE WITH IRAQ, AND UNDERMINE ASAD'S POLICY OF RECONCILIATION AND CO-EXISTENCE WITH LEBANON. IT MIGHT ALSO TRIGGER MAJOR ISRAELI COUNTERMOVES, WHICH ASAD DOES NOT WANT AND PRESUMABLY SOUGHT TO INSURE AGAINST IN SHORT TERM BY HIS SIX-MONTH RENEWAL OF UNDOF. HE MUST HAVE RECOGNIZED, HOWEVER, THAT THERE IS POINT AT WHICH PRESSURES WITHIN SYRIA, FROM MORE RADICAL PARTY AND ARMY LEADERS BACKED BY PUBLIC SYMPATHY, FOR DIRECT MILITARY INTERVENTION COULD BECOME DIFFICULT TO RESIST. IT WILL BE RECALLED THAT ASAD, IN 1970 WHEN SYRIAN

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AIR FORCE COMMANDER, OPPOSED INTERVENTION IN JORDAN AND HELPED ASSURE ITS FAILURE BY DENYING AIR COVER. THIS LED TO HIS OWN ASSUMPTION OF POWR TWO MONTHS LATER AND HIS POLICY OF GRADUALLY IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH BOTH LEBANON AND JORDAN. THESE BASIC TENETS OF HIS POLICY WOULD NOT BE SERVED BY MILITARY ADVENTURISM IN LEBANON.

4. IN SUPPORT OF ABOVE SPECULATION, DEPMINDEFENSE,

GENERAL BAGH, COMMENTED TO AMBASSADOR MAY 26 ON UNFORTUNATE WEAKNESS OF RESHID SOLH CABINET AND PREDICTED INABILITY OF ITS SUCCESSOR MILITARY GOVERNMENT TO MANAGE CRISIS. MINCULTURE KAYYALI TOOK THIS ANALYSIS A STEP FURTHER IN MAY 27 CONVERSATION, FAVORABLY CONTRASTING KHADDAM MISSION IN BEIRUT WITH SYRIAN MILITARY INTERVENTION IN JORDAN IN 1970. LEBANESE MILITARY GOVERNMENT, HE PREDICTED, WOULD AT SOME JUNCTURE INEVITABLY HAVE RESORTED TO FORCE AGAINST PLO. THIS WOULD HAVE SERIOUS REPERCUSSIONS FOR WHOLE AREA, INCLUDING MASSIVE INFUX OF PALESTINIANS INTO SYRIA. WHAT WAS NEEDED WAS LEBANESE GOVERNMENT STRONG ENOUGH TO CONTROL SITUATION, BUT ALSO ONE STRONG ENOUGH TO MAKE NECESSARY POLITICAL COMPROMISES. HE EXPRESSED PLEASURE THAT RASHID KARAME WAS EMERGEING AS LEADING CANDIDATE TO FORM NEW GOVERNMENT AND THOUGHT HE COULD DO AN EFFECTIVE JOB.

5. KAYYALI WENT ON TO ACCUSE "REJECTIONIST" FEDAYEEN GROUPS, PARTICULARLY HABBASH'S PFLP, AND IRAQI GOVERNMENT OF ACTIVELY FOMENTING STRIFE IN LEBANON AND UNDERMINING EFFORTS TO CALM SITUATION. HABBASH'S SNIPERS, HE CLAIMED, WERE FIRING ON BOTH SIDES TO KEEP POT BOILING AND FRUSTRATE COMPROMISE. KAYYALI ALSO NOTED THAT ARAFAT HAD SHOWN INSUFFICIENT ABILITY CONTROL AL-FATAH DURING PAST WEEKS DURING WHICH INDIVIDUAL FEDAYEEN HAD SPARKED INCIDENTS.

6. WE RECOGNIZE THAT OTHER OBSERVERS MAY INTERPRET SYRIAN MEDIATION AS UNHELPFUL INTERFERENCE IN LEBANESE AFFAIRS. IT MAY EVEN BE ARGUED THAT KHADDAM'S MISSION HAS SERVED ONLY TO ABORT LEBANESE ACTIONS WHICH MIGHT HAVE LED TO GOL'S ACHIEVEMENT OF CONTROL OVER THE FEDAYEEN MMovement. WE DEFER TO CONFIDENTIAL

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EMBASSY BEIRUT'S VIEWS AS TO WHETHER SUCH CONTROL WAS IN THE CARDS HAD SYRIA STAYED ON THE SIDELINES. WE SUSPECT, IN ANY CASE, THAT ASAD DECIDED ON HIS INITIATIVE WITH A FAIRLY SHREWED APPRECIATION OF THE INTRICACIES OF LEBANESE POLITICS AND PROBABLY AS WELL WITH DUE REGARD FOR THE INEVITABLY TEMPORARY NATURE OF ANY STABILITY WHICH HIS MOVES MIGHT HELP SECURE. MURPHY

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED SECRETARY'S PARTY.

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